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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 2570
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 2938
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 3495
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0566
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0478

C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 000726

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STATE ALSO FOR PRM, CA AND NEA
CAIRO FOR DOETSCH
FROM REGIONAL REFCOORD AMMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2017
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [EG](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: RUN ON UNHCR OFFICES IS REGIONAL

REF: A. AMMAN 679 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. KANESHIRO-REIMER TELCON OF 02/13/07
[1](#)C. OLSON-WESTPHAL EMAIL OF 02/07/07
[1](#)D. DAMASCUS 119
[1](#)E. BEIRUT 208

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This message was cleared with Embassies Beirut, Cairo
and Damascus.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: Ref A reported that UNHCR's office in Amman
is experiencing a spike in applications from Iraqis. UNHCR's
offices in Damascus, Beirut and Cairo are also experiencing
similar surges as UNHCR implements its new policy treating
all Iraqis from south- and central-Iraq as prima facie
refugees. UNHCR officials in Amman and Cairo believe that
NGO allegations of mistreatment of applicants at their
offices are unfounded but are reinforcing training for their
local security staff. UNHCR is half-way towards harmonizing
the documentation it issues to Iraqis in this region. At
this stage, the protection accorded to Iraqis by UNHCR's new
attestation letters is unclear. GOJ authorities are
challenging UNHCR's decision to issue these letters under its
current MOU, and UNHCR has opted not to secure formal SARG
recognition of its letters for fear it could encourage
deportations of Iraqis who do not hold UNHCR documents. END
SUMMARY.

IRAQIS REGISTERING IN SYRIA, EGYPT AND LEBANON

[1](#)3. (SBU) UNHCR officials in Syria have reported to their HQ
that crowds of up to 5,500 Iraqis were seeking entry to their
offices on February 11 and 4,000 February 12. Prior to
February 11, no more than 500 Iraqis would present themselves
to UNHCR Damascus on any given day. Despite the large
numbers of applicants, UNHCR Damascus has successfully
granted appointments to all of the Iraqis who have presented
themselves in the last week by directing 100% of their staff
-- and an increasing number of volunteers -- to support their
registration operations. However, UNHCR has now imposed a
strict interview system in Damascus to control the crowds and
to respond to complaints from private Syrians who live in the
residential district where UNHCR's offices are housed. For
the next two weeks, UNHCR will only accept new applications

for registration on Sundays and Mondays. On February 25, they plan to open a second registration office in another district of Damascus that will operate on a more extended basis.

14. (SBU) On February 14, UNHCR offices in Cairo and Lebanon also confirmed sizeable increases in Iraqi walk-ins. Deputy UNHCR Egypt representative Katarina Lumpp told Amman refcoord that her office had registered approximately 5,000 Iraqis in the last two weeks. In January, they registered only 1,500 Iraqis over the entire month. Lumpp reports that their new caseload has been overwhelmingly Iraqi since November 2006)- over 80% of those seeking to register as refugees with UNHCR in Egypt are now Iraqi nationals.

15. (SBU) UNHCR Lebanon representative Stephane Jacquemet told refcoord that the numbers of Iraqis presenting themselves to UNHCR there peaked at 250 on February 12. Throughout 2006, no more than 30 Iraqis would approach UNHCR in Lebanon on any given day.

PROJECTIONS

16. (SBU) UNHCR Damascus currently anticipates that new registrations will continue to average 500 persons/day over the next month. In Amman, UNHCR is unwilling to project but anticipates that they can meet any higher demand for registration by establishing new targets to issue 125 new registrations/day. In Beirut, UNHCR is currently preparing to increase registration interviews to 400-600 applicants per month. UNHCR Cairo anticipates that Iraqi walk-ins will remain at current levels through the end of 2007, despite comparatively stricter entry requirements (as in Lebanon, Iraqis require visas to enter Egypt) given the sizeable number already estimated to be in country. At those current rates, UNHCR Cairo believes it will register 15,000-20,000 Iraqis by the end of 2007.

TWO DRIVING FACTORS

17. (SBU) As reported ref A, UNHCR officials in the region cite two factors behind the rush to register. First, Iraqis in Syria) where demand for registration has been highest -- are reacting directly to ambiguous new SARG policies towards Iraqis, including the requirement that they register within 15 days of arrival with the Ministry of Interior, something that refugees worry is the first step of a SARG policy to return them to Iraq. The Iraqis are going to UNHCR to seek documentation that would alleviate these fears of deportation from Syria.

18. (SBU) Syria's policies are also having an impact on UNHCR operations in Lebanon and Jordan. UNHCR's Lebanon Representative Stephane Jacquemet told Amman refcoord February 13 that virtually all of the Iraqis they have registered in the last week cited the SARG policies. Jacquemet said the vast majority of Iraqis who have presented themselves in Lebanon in the last 72 hours appear to have arrived from Syria within the last two weeks. As reported in ref A, UNHCR is not seeing similar movements of Iraqis from Syria to Jordan. However, UNHCR Jordan representative Rob Breen told refcoord February 13 that many of the new applicants he has spoken to this week have volunteered that they are concerned that Jordan might impose systems similar to those being implemented in Syria.

19. (SBU) The surge of Iraqi applications in Damascus, Beirut and Cairo is also driven, as it was in Amman, by widespread awareness among expatriate Iraqis that UNHCR has shifted its policy and now views most Iraqis outside Iraq as refugees (ref A). UNHCR officials in this region report that a large proportion of the Iraqis who are presenting themselves to UNHCR offices are seeking immediate third country resettlement rather than attestation letters or assistance. Indeed, they note that a significant number of the Iraqis who rushed UNHCR offices at the start of this week had already

secured interview appointments for May or June and were seeking to reschedule them earlier to ensure that they were not referred for resettlement after newer applicants.

UNHCR REVISING ITS DOCUMENTATION

¶10. (SBU) UNHCR is trying to harmonize the documentation it issues to Iraqis in the region. With the exception of Iraqis from the north, and those who are deemed to have committed an excludable offense, Iraqis who present themselves to UNHCR offices in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are currently issued the same document -) a letter on security paper attesting to their refugee status that is valid for one year. UNHCR officials in Lebanon report that UNHCR will introduce this letter soon in Egypt and Turkey. NOTE: These letters include a photograph of the individual. UNHCR is not yet issuing more secure ID cards due to delays in implementing the required hardware/software in this region and objections from the Government of Lebanon, which prefers to issue its own ID cards. END NOTE. If an Iraqi requires a second interview to finish registration, he is immediately issued a letter valid for six months attesting to his status as an asylum seeker. Iraqis from northern Iraq who present themselves to UNHCR offices (primarily in Turkey) still require a refugee status determination by UNHCR.

¶11. (C) At this stage, the protection that these letters can convey is unclear. The refugee attestation letters state that the bearer should not be deported but UNHCR also agreed, at the request of the Government of Jordan, to include language that specifies that the bearer does not have legal residency status nor the right to work. UNHCR Damascus reports that the documentation appears to be respected by SARG officials in the sense that SARG officials are continuing to notify them of Iraqis carrying UNHCR identification who end up in their detention facilities. However, they caution that UNHCR has sought no formal arrangement with the SARG to recognize the new letters. UNHCR Syria representative Laurens Jolles explained to refcoord February 14 that he does not want to inadvertently encourage the SARG to distinguish between Iraqis who hold a UNHCR letter and those who do not.

¶12. (C) In Jordan, the GOJ is engaging UNHCR on the contents of their attestation letters. As reported ref A, senior Ministry of Interior officials convoked UNHCR Amman representative Rob Breen on February 12. In addition to inquiring about the number of letters UNHCR is preparing to issue to Iraqis in Jordan, Breen told refcoord February 14 that the MOI has challenged UNHCR's right to issue letters valid for one year given that the current UNHCR-GOJ Memorandum of Understanding requires UNHCR to secure third-country resettlement for any individual recognized as a refugee in Jordan within six months of the time they are accorded that status. Breen said that UNHCR's response has been to request that their MOU be re-negotiated. Breen said that UNHCR HQ in Geneva is currently preparing this proposed revision.

INCREASED SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

¶13. (SBU) As reported ref A, UNHCR officials report that SARG and Jordanian authorities have responded adequately to their specific requests for assistance in controlling the unprecedented numbers now approaching their offices. UNHCR HQ in Geneva is also cautioning its offices in the region to take additional preventative measures to protect Iraqis attempting to register in response to complaints they have received from NGOs that contract security or police at UNHCR offices in Amman and Cairo may have mistreated Iraqi applicants (ref B). UNHCR offices in Amman and Cairo deny any such incidents but are cooperating in UNHCR HQ's investigations.

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